



The Alabama Veteran

Bob Riley
Governor

W. Clyde Marsh
Commissioner

FALL 2007

DATES TO REMEMBER

- Navy Birthday Day—
October 13, 2007
- Marine Corps Birthday—
November 10, 2007
- Veterans Day —
November 11, 2007
- Thanksgiving Day—
November 22, 2007
- Christmas —
December 25, 2007
- New Years —
January 1, 2008

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Commissioner's Corner

Fellow Americans and veterans, it an honor to report that for the first time in decades, our country is focused on improving benefits and services for our veterans throughout the nation and especially in the State of Alabama. I am convinced that the US Department of Veterans Affairs (USDVA) is committed to providing more accessible care to our aging veterans. The USDVA is also focused on the newest generation of veterans returning home from battle which pose new challenges for the Veteran's Health Administration. We have a lot of heavy lifting to do as a nation to meet the increasing demands of these veterans for the next 30 to 40 years and beyond.

This edition of the Alabama Veteran is dedicated to WWII Veterans. We are losing members of the greatest generation at a rate of 1200 to 1500 per day. Members of this generation were a cross section of America including Hollywood stars, acclaimed musicians, factory workers and farmers. They hailed from big cities and small towns and ranged for the wealthy to the economically challenged. During WWII, the nation came together in mission and purpose and welcomed the contribution of everyone that could don the uniform. These men and women through sheer dedication, determination, patriotism, and ingenuity did whatever it took to win freedom for the world and ensure our way of life.

One example of this generation was Ensign Connie Turner Ragsdale who was a Navy nurse during World War II. She was a pacesetter who made a tremendous difference in the war by helping save countless lives and nursing soldiers, sailors, airmen, and marines back to health. Now 88 years young, she currently resides at the Bill Nichols State Veterans Home. She is as committed as ever about lifting the spirits of others and especially her comrades and fellow residents of the veterans home.



Another individual of note is 88 year old WWII veteran John Potts who was an infantry sergeant and foot soldier which is a distinction shared with thousands of other Americans. He took part in the defense of Italy while contributing in thwarting a vicious Nazi dictator's quest for world domination and removing his regime from power. John served with the 366 Infantry Division during the WWII European Campaign.

These WWII veterans not only saved our civilization but set the standards for decades to come. My generation was able to seize the advantage by standing on their shoulders and building on their accomplishments. We must steer by the stars and not forget historical significance as we navigate the uncharted waters of the future. A hearty salute to WWII veterans and my heartfelt thanks to all veterans that donned our nation's cloth.

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CRSC Retro Pay

Almost 75,000 US military retirees who were underpaid either Combat-Related Special Compensation (CRSC) or Concurrent Retirement and Disability Pay (CRDP) have received retroactive pay totaling nearly \$150 million. This leaves some 33,000 files of the initial group remaining for review with a targeted completion date of November 2007.

Upon completion, the Defense Finance and Accounting Service (DFAS) will turn its attention to a group of 12,000 to 16,000 retirees who submitted applications that fell into the queue between the time the retro-pay program began last summer and April 2007 when DFAS launched computer programs to handle the payments automatically.

Only military retirees who were underpaid are receiving payment notifications. About one third of the pay records reviewed revealed no underpayments, and those retirees will not receive notification.

Retirees with questions can call the DFAS Retro Award Hotline toll free at (877) 327-4457. Retirees can get updates on retro pay from the DFAS web site at www.dfas.mil.

VA Reaches Out to Former POWs

WASHINGTON - The US Department of Veterans Affairs (USDVA) is reaching out to former POWs not currently using VA benefits and services, urging them to contact the USDVA to find out if they are eligible for health care, disability compensation and other services.

The USDVA estimates more than 25,000 former POWs are alive today and they are trying to contact the remaining POW's not receiving any benefits or health care through an outreach program that includes asking citizens to pass the word to veterans they know.

A majority of former POWs are veterans of WWII, and their service was before the use of Social Security numbers as military "service numbers." As a result, it is difficult for USDVA to track down those who have not had recent contact with the USDVA.

During recent years through a nationwide outreach campaign that included direct mailings and the help of news media and veterans organizations, the USDVA has added hundreds of former POWs to its compensation rolls. These are people who had not previously been receiving benefits to which they were entitled.

If you know a former POW, please ask him or her to contact the USDVA at 1-800-827-1000.

Wiregrass Homeless Veterans Stand Down

The Alabama Department of Veterans Affairs recently participated in what is sure to be the first of a recurring annual event, the Wiregrass Homeless Veterans Stand Down Day. Stand down days are management tools military commanders of all U.S. military service branches use to focus attention on items or events of significant importance.

The Central Alabama Veterans Health Care System (CAVHCS), in conjunction with the Dothan area House of Benjamin, Homeless Veterans Shelter, hosted the stand down day for veterans in Dothan, Houston County and other surrounding areas. Veterans arrived from as far away as Tuskegee and Montgomery, Alabama. In some cases, the CAVHCS provided transportation services to the veterans bringing them in on buses.



Participating ADVA and VFW staff pictured left to right: 1st Row Susan Sigler, Sean Law, 2nd Row: Edsel Bonds, Marshall Smith, Ann Peterman, and John Seay.

The stand down provided aid, assistance and other services to veterans in a variety of areas ranging from social security benefits, veterans benefits, health screenings, flu shots and legal assistance.

The broader purpose of this stand down day was two fold: first, provide veterans immediate assistance in critical areas regarding shelter and food, and second, provide them with knowledge and tools that will start many of them on a path to social reintegration. In addition to the CAVHCS and the House of Benjamin, the local community also assisted by providing food, snacks, hygiene products, medical care and clothing items.

Guest speakers: Senator Jimmy W. Holley (D) 31st District, Chairperson provided opening comments and thanked the Army National Guard for sponsoring the stand down and the use of their facility. Additional speakers included Dr. Robert T. Ratliff and Dr. Kimberly Watson, CAVHCS; Mr. Earl Jones, Director of the House of Benjamin; and Wendel Stepp, Commander, Wire Grass Veterans Alliance.

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Dolores “Dee” Hardin—Prattville
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William Wyatt—Harpersville

American Veterans

Spence Stewart—Prattville

Disabled American Veterans

James Graves—Vinemont
Mark S. Moore—Killen
Chad Richmond—Pinson

Veterans of Foreign Wars

Roland Day—Birmingham
Wayne Dial—Talladega
Joe McDonald—Birmingham
Charles Stephens—Fort Payne

Military Order of the Purple Heart

Robert J. “Bob” Hewitt—Blountsville

Vietnam Veterans of America

Ken Rollins—Oxford

Governor Riley Accepts Federal Grant for Veterans' Homes

MONTGOMERY -- Alabama received \$1.49 million from the federal government for renovations and upgrades to the Bill Nichols State Veterans Home, Governor Bob Riley announced today. Those funds from the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs cover two-thirds of the total cost of the improvements made at the veteran's home located in Alexander City.

"Our veterans are all heroes. They built this country; they protected it and never really asked for much in return. We honor their sacrifice by serving them and by demanding that they receive the care they deserve," said Governor Riley.

The renovations, which began in October 2005, were completed this month. The improvements included repairs or replacement of shower facilities, removal of old sheetrock and vinyl wall covering, and repairs to baseboards.

The project's total cost was \$2.3 million, which was completely paid for by the State Department of Veterans Affairs until the federal check was presented to Governor Riley today by Deputy Assistant Secretary William McLemore of the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs. Secretary McLemore presented the funds to Governor Riley and Commissioner Clyde Marsh of the Alabama Department of Veterans Affairs during a ceremony at the State Capitol.

Several veterans attended the ceremony, including members of the Veterans of Foreign Wars, the Vietnam Veterans of America, the American Legion and the Disabled American Veterans.

Governor Riley also said today the state is searching for a site in the Jefferson County-Shelby County area to build a new veterans home. Estimated construction cost for a new veterans' home is \$40 million, \$26 million of which will be covered by the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs. The state's proposal for a new 280-bed veteran's home was approved by the department earlier this year.

"We, as a state, are committed to building a new veterans home," Governor Riley said.

There are three veterans' homes in the state. The Bill Nichols State Veterans Home in Alexander City opened in 1989. The Floyd E. "Tut" Fann State Veterans Home in Huntsville opened in 1995, as did the William F. Green State Veterans Home in Bay Minette.

Each of the three veterans' homes has 150 beds and provides skilled care nursing services. The veterans at home are assigned a physician who closely monitors the veteran's plan of care. Vision and dental screening and specialized therapy services are provided in each home.



New Documentary on WWII Debuts

The PBS documentary *THE WAR* explores the history and horror of World War II from an American perspective by following the fortunes of ordinary men and women who became caught up in one of the greatest cataclysms in human history. This epic film focuses on the stories of citizens from four American towns including Mobile, Alabama which takes the viewer through their personal and harrowing journeys, painting vivid portraits of how the war dramatically altered their lives.

A special screening of this movie was recently held at the University of South Alabama in Mobile where ADVA Veterans Service Officers Harold Taylor and Jeff Thompson were the honored guests of WW II veteran and USS Indianapolis survivor Maurice G. Bell whose story was portrayed in the movie.



Pictured left to right: Mobile County AVSO Jeff Thompson, Lois Bell, USS Indianapolis survivor Maurice G. Bell, and Mobile County VSO Harold Taylor.

Of the 1,196 men on board, only 317 survived when the USS Indianapolis was torpedoed by a Japanese submarine in the Philippine Sea on July 30, 1945. Today, only 78 survivors remain.

Free Pass for Combat Veterans

“Return to Honor” is a FREE three-day retreat and decompression weekend designed to assist you – our service men and women in your transition to the home front – whether it is active duty or civilian life. You put your life on the line (and on hold); now it’s time to take an opportunity to process your experience and move your life forward powerfully. Do it for yourself. Do it for your family.

- An opportunity to be recognized for your service.
- Learn new skills to reconnect to family and friends
- Take charge of your health, mind, body, and spirit
- Rest and recharge
- Regain a new sense of purpose and ability to serve others
- Integrating who you were before, who you were in-theatre and who you are now.

October 19-21st, 2007

Freedoms Foundation of Valley Forge

Valley Forge, PA

610-717-7797 day or evening

Sign up TODAY online at www.freedomandhonor.org

Spend time in the peaceful historic setting of the Freedoms Foundation of Valley Forge. Meals and accommodations are included. You will have plenty of free time to experience the beautiful 85 acre campus. A safe, non-military setting, this workshop is not a mental health program, but an opportunity through cognitive and experiential processes to re-new your life.



VA Increases GI Bill Rates

The Department of Veterans Affairs recently announced that the Montgomery GI Bill will soon be worth \$39,636 - a total increase of nearly \$1,000 over last year's rate.

This total is based on the new monthly full-time student payment rate of \$1,101 multiplied by the 36-month limit. If you are GI Bill eligible and have benefits remaining, you get this increase no matter when you became eligible or begin using it. The new rate is effective October 1, 2007.

Now is the time to start using your GI Bill benefits to pursue an undergraduate, graduate, technical degree or certificate. Learn more about the opportunities available and request free information from fully accredited schools today.

If you have any questions regarding your veterans' benefits, contact your nearest County Veterans Service Officer.

Veteran's Day Meals

All veterans can receive a free lunch or dinner entrée at McCormick & Schmick's Seafood Restaurants nationwide. Veterans should show proper identification (VA identification card, veteran service organization membership card, discharge papers, etc.) Visit www.mccormickandschmick.com for more information.

In addition, Golden Corral restaurants will be having their annual salute to the military on November 12, 2007 (Military Appreciation Monday) to honor all active duty and retired military personnel with a free "thank you" dinner at any Golden Corral restaurant.

Since 2001, the Golden Corral has donated 1.5 million free "thank you" meals and \$1.9 million dollars to the Disabled American Veterans. For more information, visit www.goldencorral.net.



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